

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 LILONG 00383 180355Z

ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY LILONGWE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1705

C O N F I D E N T I A L LILONGWE 0383

STADIS////////////////////////////////////

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP, OVIP, (BANDA, H. KAMUZU)

SUBJ: PRESIDENT BANDA'S INTEREST IN VISITING THE U.S.

REF: (A) STATE 43214; (B) LILONGWE 106

1. FROM CONFIDENTIAL, RELIABLE SOURCE HAVE LEARNED THAT BANDA IS MAKING PLANS TO VISIT THE U.S. AND HOPES THERE TO MEET WITH SENIOR U.S. OFFICIALS AND POSSIBLY WITH PRESIDENT CARTER. IN TERMS OF TIMING, HE IS TENTATIVELY SCHEDULING HIS TRIP FOR LATE 1978 OR EARLY 1979. HE WOULD LIKE TO ADDRESS THE UNGA AND HOPES HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO IMPROVE MALAWI'S HUMAN RIGHTS IMAGE AND COUNTER WHAT HE CONSIDERS TO BE UNFAIR AND INACCURATE PRESS ACCOUNTS ABOUT MALAWI. NO MENTION WAS MADE IN THIS "SOUNDING" OF POSSIBLY ACCEPTING INDIANA UNIVERSITY HONORARY DEGREE (REF A).

2. SOURCE INDICATED BANDA DID NOT WANT TO TAKE UP SUBJECT THROUGH EMBASSY CHANNELS BECAUSE HE WANTED TO KNOW BEFOREHAND WHETHER OR NOT USG WOULD BE RECEPTIVE TO SUCH A VISIT. FURTHER, BANDA CONSIDERS HIMSELF A STAUNCH SUPPORTER OF THE U.S. AND THE WEST BUT BELIEVES HE COULD ONLY ACHIEVE HIS OBJECTIVES IF THE CLIMATE WAS CONDUCIVE
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FOR THE TRIP AND THE U.S. WAS IN FAVOR OF AND WOULD SUPPORT IT.

2. COMMENT: GOM IS NOT AWARE THAT EMBASSY HAS BEEN GIVEN THE ABOVE INFORMATION. THE NATURE OF THE APPROACH ILLUSTRATES ONCE AGAIN THE SENSITIVITY OF BANDA'S EGO WHICH AT THIS STAGE CANNOT ACCEPT THE

SLIGHTEST BRUISE. ALTHOUGH HE WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE EXTREMELY PLEASED TO RECEIVE AN INVITATION TO MAKE AN OFFICIAL VISIT, WE DO NOT THINK HE IS NECESSARILY ANGLING OR HOPING FOR THIS BUT AS A MINIMUM WOULD WANT TO BE CERTAIN BEFORE LEAVING MALAWI THAT HE COULD ASSURE HIS PEOPLE HE WOULD BE RECEIVED AT A HIGH LEVEL IN THE USG.

AS DEPARTMENT KNOWS, EMBASSY HAD RECOMMENDED SHOULD BANDA TRAVEL TO U.S. TO RECEIVE HONORARY DEGREE, IT COULD BE HELPFUL TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION HERE IF HE WERE RECEIVED BY PRESIDENT CARTER. IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT MALAWI HAS GENERALLY SUPPORTED US IN THE UN AND HAS CONSISTENTLY ADVOCATED A POLICY OF MODERATION, CONTACT AND DIALOGUE WITH REGARD TO THE RACIAL SITUATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. HOWEVER, WE HAVE SCRUPULOUSLY REFRAINED FROM ENCOURAGING THOUGHTS OF SUCH A VISIT RECOGNIZING THAT BANDA IS VERY MUCH THE "ODD MAN OUT" IN THIS PART OF AFRICA, TO USE HIS OWN PHRASE. WE SUPPOSE, TOO, THAT SUCH A VISIT WOULD NOT BE WELCOMED BY CONGRESSMAN DIGGS AND PERHAPS OTHER MEMBERS OF THE BLACK CAUCAS AS WELL. SHOULDHE MAKE A VISIT TO THE U.S., WE THINK HE WOULD BE SHREWD AND ARTICULATE IN DEFENDING HIS POLICIE AND RECORD, BUT DOUBT HE COULD WITHSTAND MUCH QUESTIONING BY THE U.S. PRESS WITHOUT LOSING HIS TEMPER. WE THINK HE IS GENUINELY FOND
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OF THE U.S. AND WANTS TO BE LOVED AND ADMIRER BY THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. ON THE OCCASION OF HIS LAST VISIT TO THE U.S., HE HAD RECENTLY ACHIEVED POWER AS A PIONEER LEADER IN THE MOVEMENT FOR BLACK INDEPENDENCE AND WAS FATED AND PRAISED ON ALL SIDES. WE DOUBT THAT HE REALIZES HOW MUCH HIS IMAGE HAS TARNISHED IN THE INTERVENING YEARS.

3. AT THE MOMENT THERE IS NO REQUIREMENT FOR US TO SAY ANYTHING WHATSOEVER, AND IT IS POSSIBLE THAT IF HE RECEIVES NO POSITIVE FEEDBACK HE WILL DECIDE NOT TO GO AHEAD WITH HIS PLANS. IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR US TO TAKE A DIRECT READING BY MY MAKING AN INQUIRY WITH REGARD TO HIS INTENTIONS CONCERNING THE INVITATION FROM INDIANA UNIVERSITY. I SUSPECT IF I DID SO THE GENERAL PLANNING DESCRIBED ABOVE WOULD COME OUT. HOWEVER, I WOULD NOT WISH TO DO THIS UNLESS THE EMBASSY HAD THE ASSURANCE THAT IS VISIT WOULD NOT BE UNWELCOME AND THAT HE WOULD HAVE A STRONG POSSIBILITY OF BEING ABLE TO TALK AT LEAST WITH THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND THE VICE PRESIDENT, IF NOT PRESIDENT CARTER.

4. I WOULD APPRECIATE THE DEPARTMENT'S ADVICE, RECOMMENDATIONS AND/OR INSTRUCTIONS IN THIS MATTER.
STEVENSON

NOTE BY OC/T: MESSAGE DELAYED IN TRANSMISSION.

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NNN

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